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ABSTRACT

Pleasant View School for the Arts is a magnet school in northeast Ohio that draws from each level of the social strata and offers options for traditional grouping and tracking strategies in unique and effective ways. The school houses two basic programs: (1) the arts; and (2) gifted education, called the Kaleidoscope program. The arts program includes the study of drama, visual arts, dance, instrumental music, and vocal music. Special education students are mainstreamed into the school's programs and are also brought together in small group settings for special help. An emphasis is placed on process rather than product throughout the curriculum. Kaleidoscope students comprise about one-third of the school's population, and they are identified by achievement tests administered in the third grade and by committee review. Students are grouped heterogeneously in homerooms in grades 4 through 6, and take reading and language arts in their homerooms. Students in the Kaleidoscope program work on problem-solving and critical thinking activities. Teachers at the school are highly supportive of the program, stating that heterogeneous grouping allows for a variety of input from the children. Students often work in small groups, pairs, and individually, as well as in whole class situations. Achievement scores offer proof that the program at the school works. (RS)

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ALTERNATIVES TO GROUPING: PLEASANT VIEW SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS

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My job today is to acquaint you with a school located in northeast Ohio which offers options for traditional grouping and tracking strategies in some rather unique, yet effective ways. Pleasant View School for the Arts is a magnet school which draws from each level of the social strata in Stark County. It was formerly an elementary school which serviced only the lower end of the economic spectrum, and its population was comprised mostly of minority students. Magnet schools traditionally have served several functions: to provide alternatives to public schooling, and to promote desegregation in that children from a variety of background are brought together in the name of common interests. Pleasant View lives up to these purposes in terms of providing quality education to a diverse population with an emphasis on the arts.

The school houses two basic programs - the arts and gifted education, called the Kaleidoscope program. Each attempts to meet the stated goals of meeting and nurturing individual capacities and abilities. The arts program strives to "develop in students an understanding of the role of arts in life [and] provide an awareness of the arts as a reflection of human psychology, history and culture." A stated objective of the Kaleidoscope program is the "self-actualization and fulfillment of potential...fostered within an environment which is emotionally, intellectually and creatively supportive."

The arts program includes the study of drama, visual arts, dance, instrumental music, and vocal music. Arts students

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specialize in two areas in grades five through eight. Grade four is set aside for exploratory study in a number of disciplines. Kaleidoscope students are not required to specialize, although they may if they so desire; however, they must all participate to some degree in the arts program. Special education students, including those identified as learning disabled and developmentally handicapped, are mainstreamed into the majority of the school's programs and are also brought together in small group settings for special help according to their needs. All special education students are involved in the arts program as well. In addition, all students take part in some way in the visiting artists' program according to their level of participation in the specialized arts areas.

An emphasis on process is placed throughout the curriculum, rather than on product. For instance, the school produced a major musical and a ballet last year for which they sold tickets and drew rather large audiences. However, in order to stay true to their belief in process education, they will not have a production this year, but will instead have a small play that they hope to take on the road locally in order to placate the parents of this year's eighth graders. The teachers truly want to make sure that "showbiz" does not overpower the focus on learning and academics.

Kaleidoscope students comprise about 1/3 of the school's population, and they are identified by achievement tests administered in the third grade and by committee review. Arts students must apply to the school, and are generally referred by

parents and/or teachers. These students must audition for placement. Special education students are recommended by I.E.P. reports or by Intervention Assistance Teams. Kaleidoscope students are automatically enrolled because this is the only program for gifted kids in the district and they must take top priority. Arts students, including those in the LD program, are ranked according to a 9-step process that is adjudicated in each area of the arts. There are thus children of every ability level involved in this school.

Once students are enrolled, they are grouped heterogeneously in homerooms in grades 4-6. They take reading and language arts in these homerooms; and everyone has the same basic assignments to do. Students then do what they <u>can</u>, responding in different ways that adhere to their own individual strengths and needs. In grades 7 and 8, " their schedules are so varied and independent, it would be hard to find a group per se", according to Mel Lioi, principal. Grades 4-6 change classes and go to teachers who are part of a grade-level team for science, social studies, and math. Their groups are based on their participation in Kaleidoscope, the LD program (which works closely with the "regular" classroom teachers), and their arts specialty areas. Some LD children go to the resource room for reading, language arts and/or math, depending on the specifications on their I.E.P.'s. Learning disability teachers may use the students' content area textbooks to teach reading skills, or they may read the students' tests to them - whatever it takes to help the students succeed in their academic work. Much of what they do is similar to the

Kaleidoscope program's emphasis on critical thinking skills, but the lessons are executed in a way that is most meaningful to the LD students.

Ms. Lioi says of the LD kids: "It's exciting because they're learning everything they're supposed to be learning - they're doing research, they're taking the tests. And I guess what we're finding out is that they act just like the other kids. They're changing classes, they're carrying books, they're integrated...Our expectations of them are so high that they just assume that's the way it's supposed to be." Also, LD students often shine in arts areas that the Kaleidoscope kids can't, so everyone has a place in which they feel competent. Lioi also says this: "In my contention and in my staff's contention, it is important for teachers to meet with kids with different background and different ability levels and different skill levels because that's the way the world is." In this school, there's really no such thing as homogeneous grouping because homogeneous communities do not exist - not if you believe in individual strengths and weaknesses.

As for the gifted kids, the school takes into account their developmental levels. Most of their work is enrichment on a horizontal level, not on a vertical one so that Kaleidoscope children don't just get "harder stuff" or "more stuff" to do, but rather they work on problem-solving and critical thinking activities. The emphasis at Pleasant View is to teach meaningfully, the goal is in-depth understanding, not just cursory knowledge.

The fundamental practices of this school could be accomplished anywhere, but not necessarily in the same way. Schools need to address the needs of the students they work with and then meet these needs with flexible grouping and more open curricula.

For instance, this year at Pleasant View, the entire school with focus on environmental issues for 1/3 of the year, multicultural issues for 1/3, and global issues for 1/3. In the past, the academic program has been asked to support the arts; this year the arts will support the academics. They can do this because they work as a team and problem-solve together. Teachers are highly involved in what happens.

All of the teachers that I interviewed were highly positive of the school, stating that heterogeneous grouping allows for "a variety of input from the children." Focus units include a number of objectives offer flexibility in the materials used and the classroom strategies offered. Students often work in small groups, pairs, and individually as well as in whole class situations. Interactive, participatory learning is stressed. The reading program is literature based and the spelling program is based on the needs of the teachers and students in each classroom. There are no basals and no spelling workbooks! In any one art class, there may be advanced, LD. DH and kids of different grade levels - this helps teachers get to know their students as individuals because you can never take for granted that the students are ever at any one place in their ability levels. Heterogeneous grouping "provides an opportunity for

success" by not only building cooperative social skills but also by helping kids to shine in their own particular areas of strength.

By the way, their achievement test scores provide the proof of the pudding for administrators, which helps to keep this school afloat. There is always a waiting list of potential students, both in and out of Stark County.